

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

“I Hear America Singing”

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe¹ and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measure his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work.
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand
singing on the steamboat deck.
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's² on his way in the morning, or
at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of
the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day – at night the party of young fellows,
robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

— Walt Whitman

¹ Lighthearted

² “Ploughboy” = plowboy

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First Poetry-Writing Assignment: "I Hear [My Neighborhood] Singing"

This week, we will be thinking about how the places where Arnold Spirit, Jr. lives help shape who he is and the person he is becoming, and how the places we live shape us and who we are becoming. In his poem, Walt Whitman uses the verb "sing" figuratively, as a metaphor – no one may actually be singing, but the actions and images and rhythms of each person's day help shape the "music" of their identity, and that of the nation. Whitman's metaphors create images in our heads and allow us to make connotations and connections as readers so that we can grasp Whitman's idea that America is a place made vibrant, cheerful, and alive by the everyday productive work of its citizens.

Your task will be to re-write Walt Whitman's poem, which is of a type known as a "catalog" – a poem that takes the form of a list – to create a new poem that conveys to your readers a sense of the place where you live. When you compose your version, follow these two guidelines:

- 1. Your poem will be about the people who "sing" in your neighborhood (rather than "America")*
- 2. You will use figurative language – at least 5 examples of it – to describe different people, the "songs" they "sing," and the work that they do.*

Getting started...

1. Close your eyes and imagine the scene of the neighborhood where you live. Look around, and make a list of the different people, neighborhood characters, and different types of people who populate your neighborhood. Write in the space below.

2. Compose similes, metaphors, or pieces of personification to describe them. Write in the space below.

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Here's what a finished poem looks like (an example borrowed from Mr. Day):

I hear Capitol Hill singing, the harmonious tunes in my ear,
Those of the old neighbors, all still singing their lives as they have, even while more of their
 friends die or move away,
The young (to me) mothers, singing as they push kid-carrying strollers, lean athletic lionesses
 rolling spoke-wheeled chariots before them,
The dog people singing at seven a.m., at six p.m., at then ten p.m., the appointed times at which
Dogs gather in the park, singing their sniffs and smells and barks and jumps,
The vegetable farmers singing as they drive to Eastern Market from Maryland, Virginia, West
 Virginia, each truck a four-wheeled produce section,
The eccentric painter singing what he has painted in oil, as he cuts wood as precisely as a
 surgeon to make frames for others' works of art,
The clerks at Fragers' hardware singing as they find light bulbs, sell plungers, sift myriad sizes
 of screws and nails – the jewels of a handyman shining in tiny plastic drawers,
The CVS shoppers, singing with me as we wait quietly in the slow line for our prescriptions,
 working like firemen to smother the fire of impatience building inside our frames,
The pharmacist singing his polite patience to each of us in turn,
The waiter's song, the patio diner's song, the song of the Street Sense vendors patrolling the
 corner sidewalks like herons on a riverbank, fishing for an honest living,
Each singing what is their own, and all apart,
Me singing what is mine, you singing what is yours, them singing what is theirs,
Singing straightforward songs that, though different, fit together well.

Notice that the figures of speech are underlined. Please underline yours as well.

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"I Hear My Neighborhood Singing" – Fill-in-the-Blank

I hear _____ singing, the _____ I hear,

Those of _____, each one singing _____ as it should be _____ and _____,

The _____ singing _____ as _____,

The _____ singing _____ as he _____, or _____,

The _____ singing what belongs to _____ in _____, the _____

singing _____,

The _____ singing as _____, the _____ singing as _____,

The _____'s song, the _____'s on his (her) way in the morning, or

at _____ or at _____,

The _____ singing of the _____, or of the _____ at work, or of

the _____ or _____.

Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,

The day what belongs to the day – at night the _____, _____,

Singing with open mouths their _____ songs.

– "I Hear My Neighborhood Singing," by _____

(As you complete this draft, what other verbs can you think of to use besides "sing"?)

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Here's how your poem will be graded:

	Advanced: 7.5 points	Highly Proficient: 6.5 points	Proficient: 5.5 points	Basic: 5 points	Beginning: 2.5 points
Contents: This poem's structure is...	In the form of a catalog, and contains more than 10 different residents of the writer's neighborhood	In the form of a catalog, and contains 9-10 different residents of the writer's neighborhood	In the form of a catalog, and contains 7-8 different residents of the writer's neighborhood	Somewhat clear and/or only contains 5-6 different residents	Unclear, and/or lists no more than 4 different residents
Figurative Language: This poem contains...	More than 5 vivid and original figures of speech to describe people and their songs	At least 5 figures of speech, some of which are vivid and original	5 figures of speech, which are engaging but could be more vivid and original	3-5 figures of speech	Fewer than 3 figures of speech
Clarity: Meaning of images, words, and figures of speech are...	Consistently clear and precise	Mostly clear and precise	Generally clear and somewhat precise	Often clear	Frequently unclear
Spelling: Poem contains...	Very few, if any, spelling errors	Fewer than 5 spelling errors, which do not distract the reader	Noticeable spelling errors that do not significantly distract the reader	Numerous spelling errors, which distract the reader	Little to no evidence of proofreading

Score: _____ / 30 = _____ = _____